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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP (TROBERTS), NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY), NEA/P
(FFINVER), IIP/G/NEA

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: DOLLARS AND DISTORTIONS

1. Summary: The Omani Internet chat room "Sablat al-Arab" -- or simply "Al-Sablah" -- is the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, Al-Sablah nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- Decoupling the Omani rial from the dollar
-- Bad press from arrests

End summary.

Decoupling from the Dollar

2. Al-Sablah members have repeatedly called upon the government to decouple the Omani rial from the U.S. dollar. Participants argue that the rial is negatively impacted by the decreased value of the dollar. One Al-Sablah subscriber wrote, "The value of our rial is being dragged down in world security markets because of the weak American dollar." Many participants urged the government to peg the rial to the Euro or link it to a basket of currencies to protect its buying power. Another member stated, "Although linking the rial to the dollar made sense in the 1980's when oil prices were low, it does not make sense now. The government should take the bold step of separating our currency from the dollar." Other participants demanded that the government justify any decision to keep the rial pegged to the dollar. One stated, "The falling U.S. dollar will cause an economic crisis in Oman. What will the Minister of National Economy do to prevent this?" Another participant provided an explanation of why the rial is pegged to the dollar, "We should note that the rial is linked to the dollar because most oil exports are sold in dollars. This is an important point to keep in mind."

Accusations of Abuse

3. The broadcast media ran several reports on the arrest of local religious leaders and police raids on their homes. The Paris-based Arab Committee for Human Rights also issued a statement describing the incidents. Al-Sablah members commented, "Why would organizations like the Arab Committee for Human Rights care about these Omanis when hundreds of our brothers in Palestine and Iraq are suffering?" Several participants expressed sadness that negative stories about Oman are finding their way into the media. "After a long period of being ignored by the international media, there is now one bad story about Oman after another. When it comes to Oman, the media only seems interested in stories about bans on journalists or human rights abuses." One participant wrote, "It seems the world has only now become aware that there are human rights violations in this country. If high profile scholars had been the victims of human rights violations earlier, perhaps the world would have seen the problem years ago." Another member stated, "The government should act quickly to explain the reason for its actions to restore public confidence."

BALTIMORE